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ABSTRACT

Occupational therapists should work cooperatively with special educators and vocational educators in the prevocational and vocational education of handicapped adolescent students. The occupational therapist's knowledge of disabling conditions, the therapeutic relationship, and methods of adapting tools and equipment are of particular value in such an interdisciplinary team. A prevocational program for the handicapped should stress such necessary aspects as attitude toward work, punctuality, appearance, attitude toward coworkers, attitude toward supervisor, speed of work, concentration/attention, personal hygiene, and social skills. Handicapped adolescents also need experiences to provide appropriate career awareness. (DB)

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TEACHERS AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS:

A PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Pre-Vocational

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TEACHERS AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS:

A PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Pre-Vocational

Legislative mandates in recent years have granted our nation's school systems a challenging roll in assisting handicapped students with special education needs to prepare for a suitable and rewarding future in the world of work. P. L. 94-142; section 504 of P. L. 93-112 - The Rehabilitation Act of 1973; P. L. 94-482 - The Vocational Education Act of 1963, as amended by The Education Amendments of 1976; and section 503 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 contain specific implications for the vocational education and employment of handicapped individuals. A brief review of these regulations will explain why vocational education and employment opportunities are becoming more within the reach of handicapped students.

P.L. 94-142 indicates that vocational education is an important component of a handicapped student's education and is given special emphasis in the section of the law on availability. It states: "Each public agency shall take steps to insure that its handicapped children have available to them the variety of educational programs and services available to non-handicapped children in the area served by the agency, including art, music, industrial arts, consumer and homemaking education, and vocational education." (7)

Section 504 requires nondiscrimination on the basis of handicap and affirms vocational education accessibility for handicapped students.

This law applies to all handicapped individuals and isn't restricted to the age categories found in P.L. 94-142 (7).

P.L. 94-482 requires a state to spend at least 10% of its total federal funds in vocational education for handicapped students and must be used "to the maximum extent possible to assist handicapped persons to participate in regular vocational education programs." (7) P.L. 94-482 also communicates the importance of the individualized education program. The IEP must have a vocational component that is realistic for the student's potential. More complete assessment information is essential before appropriate objectives can be written in the vocational area. Teachers can play a major role by ensuring that this area is included for each student.

"Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires that every employer doing business with the federal government under a contract for more than $2,500 take affirmative action to recruit, hire, train, and promote handicapped individuals. Those businesses holding contracts of $50,000 or more and having at least 50 employees are required to develop and maintain an affirmative action program that sets forth policies and practices regarding the hiring of handicapped employees" (7).

Vocational education programs in the local schools in a community are excellent resources for businesses and industries to make use of in their recruitment efforts for qualified handicapped individuals. Historically, handicapped individuals had to pursue employment by themselves or with the help of their family. There were no organized evaluation procedures to aid vocational placement of the handicapped as well as anyone else seeking employment.

It was during World War I that some of the first attempts at systematic placement were initiated. At this point little consideration was given to the individual's interests, but primarily to his ability to perform a task well and consistently. Since then the vocational evaluations developed and used to determine suitability for employment have changed in many ways and have been broadened to include both physical and psychological disabilities. Twenty years ago vocational evaluations were done to a large extent by occupational therapists, but now they are usually administered by vocational counselors. Since precise information is needed identifying the student's strengths and weaknesses in such areas as manual dexterity, visual discrimination, work speed, quality of work, short and long term memory, ability to understand written and verbal instruction, and job skills, it is valuable if the student has an interdisciplinary assessment.

Often educational personnel are not familiar with the expertise of occupational therapists and their history of involvement in pre-vocational programs and sheltered workshops. Therefore, they have been overlooked frequently as part of the team. As a member of the interdisciplinary team, the occupational therapist can provide useful information about many other equally important factors relating to the student capabilities such as interpersonal relationships with co-workers, work behavior, motivation, interests, work readiness, self core, and transportation problems. The significant contribution that occupational therapists can make to the pre-vocational and vocational areas of education is being rediscovered today as the schools and community become aware of their obligation to prepare all students for employment. The occupational therapist's knowledge of the disease process and disabling conditions, of achieving a therapeutic

relationship, of methods for adapting tools and equipment, of ways for simplifying work, and of task analysis prepare her to be a valuable contributor to a pre-vocational training program (3).

Communication needs to be improved between vocational education, special education and occupational therapy so that a cooperative plan can be developed to make the legislative promise for vocational education a reality for handicapped students. The track record for vocational education has not been good for students with certain types of handicapping conditions such as those with severe physical or mental handicaps. Because the end goal of these programs is for the student to be employed, many students with severe or multihandicapping conditions have not been accepted into the programs. Generally, they can not work in the traditional occupations that vocational education programs prepare students to be employed such as auto mechanics, cosmetology, janitorial services, and food services. However, if special educators and occupational therapists will join together and assist the people in vocational education programs to better understand these students and the adapted and creative teaching methods necessary for them to learn, many more handicapped students can successfully function in either paying or volunteer work situations. Occupational therapists can carefully analyze the many tasks involved in the job areas and help teachers and employers break the total job into smaller units. A student may have the physical and mental skills to perform only one of the smaller units like washing hair, but never giving a permanent wave. It is essential that both training and employment situations be flexible enough to allow for the specialized needs and abilities of all students.

"A 1976 Report to Congress states that of over 13 million individuals served in vocational education in 1974, less than 2% were handicapped" (7).

It is estimated that 10% of the school population nationally has a handicapping condition. Since the estimated cost by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped to maintain an individual in an institution during his life is a quarter of a million dollars, it takes only simple mathematics to discover that it is more cost effective to develop improved vocational educational programs for handicapped students that will make them productive individuals. Special educators and occupational therapists can contribute in numerous ways to this area of education and must become more involved in the process of program development and establishing the administrative policies so that more opportunities will be made available to handicapped students.

Students with all kinds of handicapping conditions must be provided appropriate career awareness and pre-vocational instruction. There is not sufficient time to discuss the individual characteristics of pre-vocational training for each type of handicapping condition. A broader aspect of pre-vocational training which applies to all of the areas will be discussed.

Several studies and research efforts have discovered that learning of certain work habits must occur in a child's early years before job skills acquired later can be successfully used. A handicapped student may be able to perform a job skill consistently and well but eventually lose his job because of improper personal hygiene or not being punctual. Establishing work habits - good or bad - is part of normal childhood development. Often the handicapped child has not developed good work habits because he has spent most of his life in an institution, medical facilities, or home setting where his experiences have been limited.

Since many vocational education programs begin to work with the students at fourteen years of age or older, bad work habits and bad social

skills have had many years to become established. The special educator and occupational therapist can play an invaluable function by providing experiences in the handicapped student's early school years to develop these necessary pre-vocational skills. The skills include: attitude toward work, punctuality and regular attendance, appearance, attitude toward co-workers, attitude toward supervisor/authority, speed of work, concentration/attention, personal hygiene, and social skills (1).

Attitude Toward Work. Early in childhood an individual becomes aware that employment and work are a necessary part of life. His mother, father, or another adult he loves is seen in the role of a worker and the child begins to identify work as an important and desirable aspect of adult life. The handicapped child may not have experienced this developmental process and may fail to take his work seriously enough when placed in a job situation. He may not take pride in his work and not strive to perform at his highest potential.

Punctuality. When a child starts to school he learns he is expected to conform to attendance rules and be on time and attend every day. The importance of attendance is stressed by recording your presence and requiring an excuse when tardy or absent. Parents usually recognize the importance of this and encourage the child's regular and punctual attendance. The institutionalized or home bound child may not have the opportunity to learn these values.

Appearance. Learning to dress appropriately for work also begins early in life. Children observe that people involved in different occupations wear different clothes: the maintenance man wears coveralls, the nurse wears a white uniform and firemen wear a special protective uniform. Even

though dress codes and acceptable dress standards have relaxed greatly in our society, an individual's appearance and dress still influences his acceptance by co-workers. Often handicapped children continue to be dressed in juvenile clothes as adults or in clothes very out of style which stresses their being different.

Attitude Toward Co-workers. Interpersonal relationships effect employment success. In most job settings an individual is part of a work group and must have enough interpersonal skills not to annoy his co-workers. Children learn interpersonal skills from birth by interacting with others, but their school experience provides the greatest opportunity for developing and practicing the skills that will form the basis for later relationships with co-workers. A handicapped individual's ability to form positive relationships may be prevented by difficulty with communication, negative attitudes toward people of different cultures, and the inability to allow others to be praised or given attention by the authority figure.

Attitude Towards Supervisor. In job situations a worker must know how to relate with acceptable behavior toward the person in authority. A child's attitude toward authority evolves during his developing years, and it begins when his parents first establish restrictions or rules. When the child goes to school, the teacher becomes an important part of this process. The teacher is probably the person nearest to the role of a work supervisor that the child is associated with during his growing years. This relationship can have a strong influence on the student's ability to function later in a work setting. Handicapped students and especially mentally retarded ones may have difficulty with their work supervisor because they need constant reassurance and frequently demand the supervisor's attention.

Speed of Work. Lack of speed is a frequent cause for handicapped individuals losing their job. Speed is a complicated area and has been proven important to a satisfactory adjustment to work. Since the worker's productivity influences a company's profit, employers are concerned about the speed that tasks are accomplished. This is a skill that should be taught early since some studies have indicated that a person's average speed of performance is established by the teen years.

Concentration/Attention. The ability to attend starts developing as the infant begins to interact with objects and people in his environment. Attention is a lower level skill than concentration which is usually learned during the educational training of an individual. Many jobs available to handicapped people require attending skills rather than concentration. It is important to be aware of things that may interfere with the ability to concentrate such as: age, boredom, and drug reactions.

Personal Hygiene. Cleanliness, good oral hygiene, and other good grooming habits are important for successful functioning at work. The lack of these habits can interfere with many of the previously mentioned areas. Home programs and behavior modification techniques can assist with teaching these habits.

Social Skills. In order to be prepared for a work situation it is essential that students know such social behaviors as looking at the person with whom one is talking, returning proper friendly greetings as "hello" and "goodbye," and not speaking too loudly and at inappropriate times.

There are some basic survival skills that need to be taught as pre-vocation training such as basic knowledge of money, telling time, use of public transportation and telephones, sign his name, and basic reading and math skills.

One pre-vocational training program divided the essential skills for successful employment into four areas: social skills, work behaviors, work skills, and personal appearance.

Social Skills	Work Behavior
Interpersonal relationships	Attendance
Communication	Punctuality
Coping with criticism	Using time card
Independent decision making	Acting out - inappropriate behavior
job interviewing	
Work Skills	**Personal Appearance**
Task analysis	Grooming and hygiene
Attending to task	Appropriate dress
Speed - increased productivity	Physical appearance
	Motor skills

Another important experience that pre-vocational training can provide is appropriate career awareness. The handicapped adolescent typically lacks exposure to the world of work and needs to be provided with activities for development of career knowledge and appropriate work attitudes (6).

Non-handicapped students receive this through field trips to industry, fire stations, and going to the office with Mom and Dad. They also receive on the job pre-vocational experiences through summer jobs, baby sitting, paper routes, and career days at school, etc. It is important that handicapped students have similar experience to prepare then to choose a job.

Improving vocational education and employment opportunities for the handicapped has come a long way in the last ten years but we still have a great deal of room for improvement. Occupational therapists and special education teachers can be very instrumental in accomplishing this change.

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